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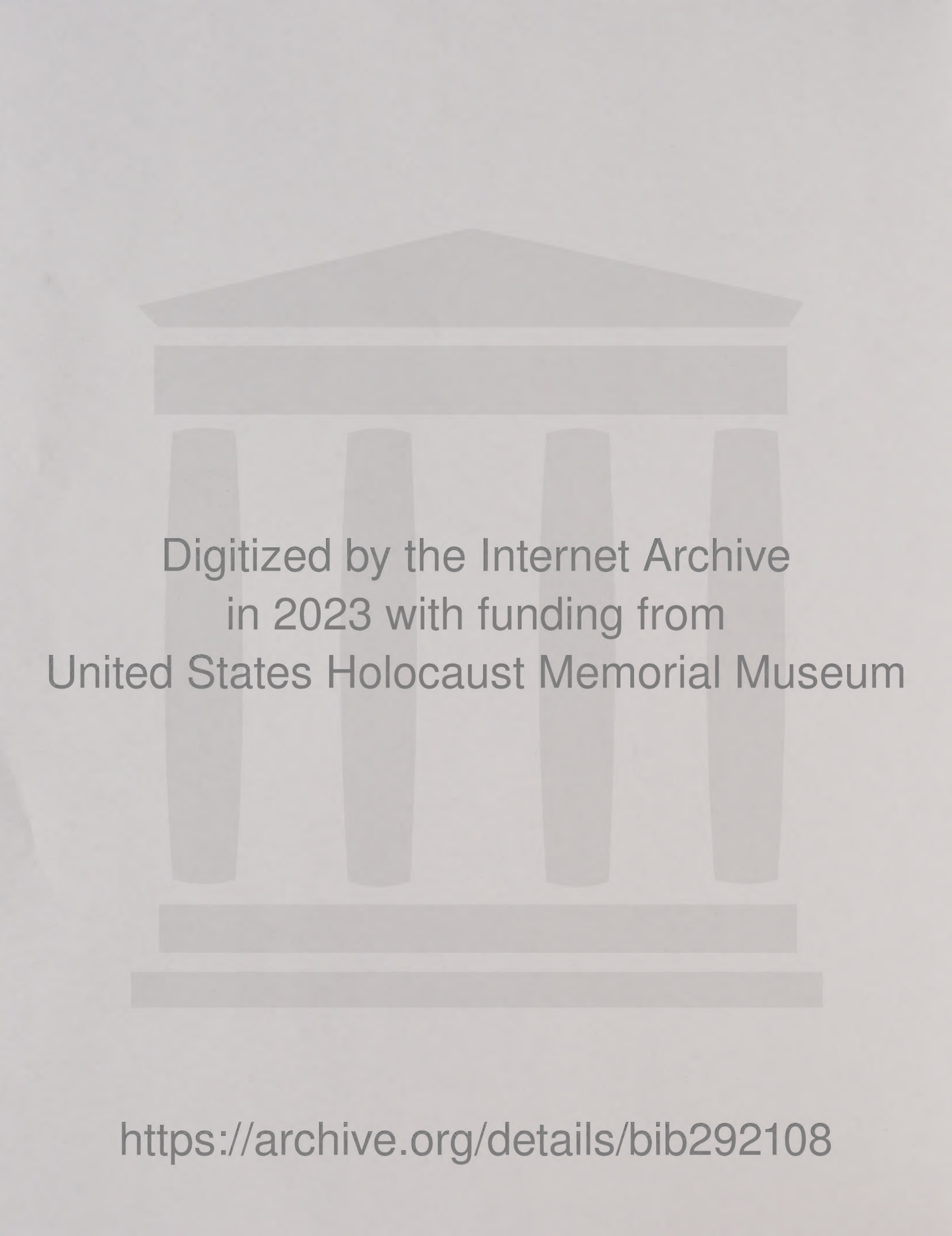
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Sue Marxheimer
66 Westridge Rd.
Edmonton, AB T5T 1B4
Canada
e-mail: suemar@telus.net

Conversion

This piece is written as a synopsis of the crux of my experiences in England, and so of my memoir.

They should have forbidden my conversion to the Church of England (Anglican). I was only ten, too young to know my own identity, too young to make such a decision. They should have insured at least that for me.

Who's to know why they did not? In l940, my parents, were refugees in England. They were trying hard to adjust to very difficult circumstances. Many members of our families had been left behind to be tortured and/or slaughtered by the Nazis. We had been lucky to escape at the last moment, before the border was closed.

Mother, always socially conscious, wanted me to become a "*proper little English girl"* as fast as possible, whatever that may have meant to her. If I wanted to convert, it would probably make life easier for me, so be it. She didn't understand how pious I felt. My father, well, I never knew what he thought about it. He went along with his wife. Besides, he was emotionally very fragile, still recovering from a breakdown and (probably) a suicide attempt.

So, they came to my school and watched my baptism and later my confirmation. What did they think, standing there in the back of the little chapel? Surely,they must have felt some emotional shakiness, some sense of unreality. If so, I could not see it. They never spoke of it to me, never understood how serious I was about it all. But, during the holidays at home, my father woke me up every Sunday to send me off to church. How could he do this without a pained or at least strange feeling of alienation? I was

Sue Marxheimer
66 Westridge Rd.
Edmonton, AB T5T 1B4
Canada
e-mail: suemar@telus.net

becoming something I really wasn't and could never be, and still be true to myself and my people. He never discussed it. He did his job, and I went to church.

I had been a truly religious Jewish girl in Czechoslovakia. As I listened to my grandfather, the cantor, chanting in the Synagogue, I was swept up in the fervor of the Holy Days. Now I was a very religious Christian child in England. It was really hard work, trying to be me, whatever that was. I believed deeply in the Christian doctrine I heard at school and church. I prayed to Jesus, confessed my sins and took communion.

Later, when I was sixteen, when the partition of Palestine became the issue of the day, I heard only the British side of the story, definitely pro-Arab. Sometimes I felt a pang of guilt when the press panned the Jewsish need for a homeland, the need to fight for it. Basically, I thought them wrong. I became, shamefully, somewhat anti-semitic. I certainly knew nothing of the joyous celebrations of my people, I was not a part of them. Not until we immigrated to the U.S., was I aware that there was another side of the whole situation that I had to consider.

But what was I a part of? I really didn't fit in any way with my companions at boarding school. They were mostly quite wealthy, and I was at school on charity. I don't know if this was gereally known, but I knew it and that was enough. I had little in common with them. My whole experience as a refugee, they could not possibly even imagine. At school and at home, I was alone with my beliefs, prayers and, above all, my rich fantasies of belonging somewhere and counting for something.